

The Daughters of Kobani
By Gayle Tzemach Lemmon
Reading Group Guide

About this Guide

The questions, discussion topics, and other material that follow are intended to enhance your group's conversation of Gayle Tzemach Lemmon's *The Daughters of Kobani*, an intimate and revealing inside look at the band of brave women who risked everything to stop ISIS and build their own far-reaching experiment in women's equality right on the ashes of the fight against the Islamic State.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Before reading this book, what did you know about the conflict in Syria, including the involvement of the United States? How did Lemmon's reporting enhance your knowledge of these events?
2. What surprised you about the role of women's rights and women's emancipation in this story?
3. How big a role does the founder of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, play in the day-to-day and overarching mission of the all-female militia? How did you sense his presence in the book?
4. A main motivating factor in the establishment of the Women's Protection Units is women's independence and equality. Did the limitations and oppressions that the women in this story faced bring to mind other movements for gender equality, in the past and at present? How about here at home?
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6. Looking back to the history of the Kurdish people and their diaspora across several countries, why do you think this group was able to launch this mission with such discipline, and ultimate success?
7. Even as children and young adults, many of the women we meet in the book—Azeema, Rojda, Nowruz, and Znarín—recognize the flaws in their society's treatment of women. How are they ahead of their time in standing up to tradition with their involvement in sports, pursuit of romance and education, and a general sense of following their own path? Did they remind you of women in your own community, your own family?
8. From 2011 onward, the U.S. stance toward the Assad regime and ISIS changed drastically. Did you agree with the Obama and Trump administrations' tactics and decisions in response to ISIS and the plight of the Kurds? Discuss the delicate balance of maintaining international diplomacy and alliances while defending human rights and America's relationships with Turkey and Russia as the civil war unfolded.
9. Do you think the conflict in Syria could have been avoided if the U.S. had taken different measures early on? How do you think America's views on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan played a role, if at all?

10. Discuss how the the Women’s Protection Units were able to overcome the highly trained, heavily armed forces of ISIS prior to the arrival of American support. What ideologies and relationships motivated the women to keep fighting and risk their lives against such an enormous threat?
11. How did the American military commanders treat the Women's Protection Unit members once they arrived to train them and provide supplies? What was the general attitude toward their efforts and tactics? What, if anything, surprised you about the relationship between the Americans and the all-women’s units?
12. What role did the internet and social media play in the international coverage of and response to this war, as well as to the ways it was fought on the ground? Consider how the women kept in touch with their families and each other even in the midst of battle. What was the role of cameras and TV?
13. Compare and contrast the personalities and leadership styles of Azeema, Rojda, and Znar-in. What did each of them bring to their positions to help them maintain morale for themselves and be resilient after injury and defeat?
14. How does the daily onslaught of war affect the women, emotionally and physically?
15. Return to some of the key battle scenes of the war, such as Kobani, Manbij, and Raqqa. How did you experience these retellings of combat through the eyes of the women? Did they remind you of the narratives of other wars throughout history—what is similar and what is different about the nature of this conflict compared to others? Is it different to see war through women’s eyes?
16. Parallel to the combat on the ground was the political combat that would codify the freedoms the all-women’s units were fighting for in principle. How did Fauzia Yusuf et al handle the introduction of radical new ideas about the role of women into their government in 2012- 2014? During and after the fall of ISIS, how did those ideals and decrees manifest in real time?
17. The book ends in a moment when the future of Syria is still unclear, and threat looms from major international powers. At the time of your reading, how has this situation evolved, if at all?
18. The author describes being called to tell this story despite its uncertain outcome because of a “sense that something important was happening in a place the world wanted to forget” (149). Why would the world want to forget Syria? How have Western nations erected and maintained boundaries to other parts of the world, despite globalization and increased access to technology? How do you personally engage with world events? Does social media make you feel more or less connected? Technology?
19. What would you do if you were called to arms in the way that these women were? What rights would you be willing to fight for—or have you fought for?

Suggested Further Reading

No Turning Back by Rania Abouzeid

Behind the Beautiful Forevers by Katherine Boo

The Girl Who Escaped ISIS by Farida Khalaf

The Book Collectors by Delphine Minoui

Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi

The Underground Girls of Kabul by Jenny Nordberg

We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled by Wendy Pearlman

Black Flags by Joby Warrick